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30 April 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Robert M. Gates

SUBJECT : Poland

1. I have been convinced for the past six months that the Soviets either through the Poles or on their own would take coercive measures to reverse the liberalizing reforms in Poland and to curb the power of the unions. There is still a chance, and perhaps a good one, that such measures will be taken before the party congress now scheduled for mid-July.

2. On the other hand, I believe we must begin to give some attention to the prospect that the Soviets will not intervene in Poland and that the reform movement will continue. With each passing day and the further consolidation of the political changes in Poland, the Polish nation and its government become a more united force, thereby enormously raising the costs to the Soviets of any intervention. In recent months, the Soviets have had to contemplate the prospect that an intervention would be very different than 1953, 1956, and 1968--that is, that it would involve real war with the entire Polish nation. Accordingly, the Soviets would have to look to an invasion force and logistical support structure probably numbering well over a million men and untold political and economic costs. Indeed, the Soviets also would have to consider a substantial military cost, including probably heavy casualties.

3. It is possible that by a combination of skill, luck and inadvertence, the Poles have carried out the first successful counter-revolution in the Soviet system. They have carefully reaffirmed at each step Poland's loyalty to the Warsaw Pact, CEMA, and to the Soviet Union itself. There has been little anti-Sovietism, little questioning of the party's leading role and in all of the strikes virtually no interference with the railroads or national communications systems. In short, they have given the Soviets none of the pretexts or provocations that a divided leadership would need to bring together a majority in the Politburo in favor of military action. And, at the same time, we must not forget how far Poland has gone down the road of reform. Who would have thought a year ago that Poland would be led by a Communist Party whose First Secretary had a fixed term, whose leadership was chosen by secret ballot from among many candidates, whose government and party leaders would have an increasingly successful collaborative relationship with a union whose intellectual base is

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found at least in part in dissidents who wish to overthrow the Stalinist system in Poland, and that the Soviets would effectively acquiesce in these changes? Poland indeed seems on the path to rejecting Leninism-Stalinism while keeping Marxism.

4. Because we have been so confident that the Soviets would go in, we have given very little attention to the implications of non-intervention and continuation of the current processes underway in Poland, for Poland, the rest of Eastern Europe and for the Soviet Union itself. In my view, we may be witnessing one of the most significant developments in the post-war period which, unchecked, may foreshadow a profound change in this decade in the system Stalin created both inside the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe.

5. Poland obviously still has some distance to go before it is out of the woods with respect to Soviet suppression, but one threshold after another has been crossed and the Soviets have been unable to bring themselves to pay the costs of halting the seemingly inexorable march toward liberalization in Poland. I think it is time for our analysts to address the implications of Soviet non-intervention in Poland for both Poland and its communist allies. I am beginning to draw the conclusion that many of us, and I certainly include myself, may have been proved more Stalinist and inflexible toward Poland than the Soviet leaders themselves. But then we only had to articulate the costs of intervention, not pay them.

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